

# Brussels Sprouts

Brussels sprouts, is a hardy, slow-growing, long-season vegetable belonging to the cabbage family. In the proper season of the year, it can be grown with fair success in most areas of the country. In mild areas, or where there is deep snow cover, the sprouts may overwinter.

The "sprouts" (small heads that resemble miniature cabbages) are produced in the leaf axils, starting at the base of the stem and working upward. Sprouts improve in quality and grow best during cool or even lightly frosty weather. Brussels sprouts require a long growing period, though newer hybrids have greatly reduced this requirement. In all but the most northern states, summers are usually too warm for completely satisfactory production from spring plantings. Plants set out in late spring to early summer grow satisfactorily and mature high-quality sprouts when the fall weather begins to cool.



## Recommended Varieties

### Hybrid

**Bubbles** (82 days to harvest, dependable, tolerates warm weather, resistant to rust)

**Jade Cross** (90 days, resistant to yellows)

**Jade Cross E** (90 days; sprouts larger, easier to remove from stalk than with original strain)

**Oliver** (85 days; early; easy-to-pick, attractive sprouts)

**Prince Marvel** (90 days; tight; sweet sprouts)

**Royal Marvel** (85 days; tolerant to bottom rot and tipburn; tight sprouts; very productive)

**Valiant** (90 days; smooth, uniform sprouts)

### Open-pollinated

**Long Island Improves** (90 days; variable, harder to produce heavy, uniform crop with this variety)

**Rubine** (105 days; red plants and sprouts; novel, but very late maturing, not nearly as productive as recommended hybrid green types).

## When To Plant

Transplant in early summer to midsummer about the same time that you would plant late, long-season cabbage. The seed should be sown in a protected location in seed flats, 4 to 5 weeks before transplanting. Transplant the seedlings to the permanent garden location when space and time allow; but at least 90 to 100 days before the first frost date for your area. For summer harvest, you must plant transplants of an early, heat-resistant variety in very early spring. Sprouts maturing in hot weather or under dry conditions are more likely to develop bitterness. Fall production is the most practical and rewarding in most parts of the country.

## Spacing & Depth

Space plants 24 to 36 inches apart in the row, or 24 inches in all directions in beds. Cover seeds 1/4 to 1/2 inch deep and transplant the seedlings when they are about 3 inches tall. Do not allow transplants to become stunted in the flats before transplanting.

## Care

Brussels sprouts are grown much like the related cole crops, cabbage and broccoli. Apply one side-dress application of nitrogen fertilizer when the plants are 12 inches tall and water to keep the crop growing vigorously during the heat of summer. Without ample soil moisture, the crop fails. Insect control is also very important at this stage to keep the plants growing vigorously. Cultivate shallowly around the plants to prevent root damage. The sprouts form in the axils of the leaves (the space between the base of the leaf and the stem above it).

Commercial gardeners remove the leaves to accelerate harvest, but this practice is not essential in the home garden. Some gardeners believe that the sprouts develop better if the lowermost six to eight leaves are removed from the sides of the stalk as the sprouts develop. Two or three additional leaves can be removed each week, but several of the largest, healthiest, fully expanded upper leaves should always be left intact on top to continue feeding the plant. About 3 weeks before harvest, the plants may be topped (the growing point removed) to speed the completion of sprout development on the lower-stem area.

## Harvesting

The small sprouts or buds form heads one to two inches in diameter. They may be picked (or cut) off the stem when they are firm and about one inch in size. The lower sprouts mature first. The lowermost leaves, if they have not been removed already, should be removed when the sprouts are harvested. Harvest sprouts before the leaves yellow.

## Common Problems

Aphids, cabbage worms and diseases.

## Questions & Answers

**Q. Why do my sprouts remain loose tufts of leaves instead of developing into firm heads?**

A. When the sprouts develop in hot weather (after spring seeding or during a warm fall), they often do not form compact heads. Use transplants for early plantings and maintain ample soil moisture. You also can cut off the top growing point when the plant reaches 24 to 36 inches in height. This practice stops leaf growth and directs the plant's energy to the developing sprouts. In addition, check the variety you have planted. The newer, faster-maturing varieties are generally more suitable for getting dependable yields.

## Selection & Storage

Brussels sprouts, what an odd name for a vegetable that has the appearance of a "cute little baby" cabbage. No one seems to know where Brussels sprouts originated but it is assumed they came from Belgium where Brussels is the capital city. In parts of Europe they are also known as "Brussels cabbage", which seems appropriate since they are a subspecies of the common cabbage.

Most Americans who do not like Brussels sprouts are haunted by childhood memories of smelly, army green, bitter, mushy globs that had to be eaten before dessert. Fresh Brussels sprouts, properly cooked, are deliciously delicate in flavor. Maybe it is time to give Brussels sprouts another chance, this time with a new attitude and a modern cooking spirit.

Like cabbage and cabbage sprouts, Brussels sprouts are a cool weather crop. They should be harvested when the sprouts are small, compact and bright green. Avoid yellowing sprouts with

signs of wilt rot or insect damage. Harvest sprouts when they are no larger than 1 to 1 1/2 inches in diameter.

The fresher the sprouts, the better the flavor, so refrigerator storage should not exceed a day or two. Remove any damaged or irregular outer leaves and store fresh unwashed sprouts in plastic bags in the vegetable bin of the refrigerator.

## **Nutritional Value & Health Benefits**

Unlike most green vegetables, Brussels sprouts are rather high in protein. Although the protein is incomplete—lacking the full spectrum of essential amino acids—a serving of whole grains will make them complete. As a member of the cabbage family Brussels sprouts are a cruciferous vegetable. Current research suggests vegetables in this group offer protection against some forms of cancer.

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### **Nutrition Facts**

(1/2 cup cooked)

Calories 30

Protein 2 grams

Carbohydrates 7 grams

Dietary Fiber 2 grams

Potassium 247 mg

Vitamin C 48 mg

Folate 47 mcg

Vitamin A 561 IU

## **Preparation & Serving**

The key to cooking Brussels sprouts is in not overcooking them. The leaves cook faster than the core, so cut an X in the bottom of the stem for even cooking when cooking the sprouts whole. As a rule, when Brussels sprouts have lost the bright green color, they are overcooked and have lost a considerable amount of nutritional value as well. Depending on size, cooking time should not exceed 7 to 10 minutes whether you are steaming, braising or boiling. Select sprouts of even size for uniform cooking. Large sprouts should be cut in half.

## **Home Preservation**

The best home preservation method for Brussels sprouts is freezing. As with any vegetable, Brussels sprouts will need to be blanched prior to freezing.

1. Select firm, young, tender heads. Examine heads carefully to make sure they are free from insects.
2. Trim, removing coarse outer leaves. Wash thoroughly. Sort into small, medium and large sizes.
3. Over high heat, bring one gallon of water to a rolling boil in a blanching pot. Blanch one pound of Brussels sprouts at a time. Start counting blanching time as soon as the water returns to a boil.
4. Blanch small heads 3 minutes, medium heads 4 minutes and large heads 5 minutes.
5. To cool, plunge the blanching basket of Brussels sprouts into an ice water bath. Use one pound of ice per pound of vegetables in one gallon of water.
6. Cooling should take the same amount of time as blanching, depending on the size of the heads.
7. Drain, pack into zip-closure bags or freezer containers, label and date. Freeze for up to one year at zero degrees or below.

## Recipes

### Braised Brussels Sprouts with Mustard Butter

Braising is an excellent method for cooking Brussels sprouts. Braising refers to cooking food with a small amount of liquid in a tightly covered pan.

1 pound small, firm, bright green Brussels sprouts  
1/2 teaspoon salt  
1/2 cup water  
2 tablespoons melted unsalted butter or margarine  
2 tablespoons Dijon mustard  
Salt and freshly ground black pepper

1. Check each head, peel off any loose or discolored leaves. Using a paring knife, cut an X through the core end of each head.
2. Bring sprouts, water and salt to a boil in a 2-quart saucepan over medium-high heat. Lower heat, cover and simmer. Shake pan once or twice during braising to redistribute sprouts.
3. Cook until just tender 8 to 10 minutes. Test by piercing with a knife tip. Drain well.
4. Melt butter in a large skillet of medium heat. Whisk in mustard until smooth. Cook , stirring constantly until smooth and creamy, about 30 seconds.
5. Add sprouts to skillet, coating well with the butter mixture. Season to taste with salt and pepper and serve. Serves 3 to 4.